

Narrative Report of 2012

We are in the 19th year of our service to the community at large, and we continuously find ourselves growing like a snowball, gaining more and more momentum as time goes on. Our work has expanded in the local, regional, and international scene where we became members of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), Global Alliance for the Establishment of Ministry and Departments of Peace, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Conflict, World Council of Churches, and the Compassionate Listening Group. Regionally we work with the Arab Partnership for the Prevention of Violence, Middle East Council of Churches, and Mediation Coalition. Locally, we are working with numerous amounts of organizations focusing on women, youth, and children and advocacy. Our active work on the local scene does not only believing in working from bottom-top but also from top-bottom. Through our engagement and multi-track diplomacy, we have met with different representatives holding high-level positions in their governments who raise awareness for our cause here at Wi'am.

Also, Wi'am has expanded its programs on the ground, so that today we have 10 staff members, 30 interns from local and Western universities, and hundreds of volunteers from local areas. We are always directed by our vision and our reflection; action will reflect our vision. As Nelson Mandella would say, "Vision without action is but a dream. Action without vision is merely passing time. Vision with action can change the world."

With additional funding, Wi'am would like to put a permanent awning over the upper patio. The playground sod remains healthy thanks to faithful watering through the heat. The herb gardens are flourishing, providing fine fresh-brewed flavors for our tea. Flowers continue to bloom, big and small, but most encouraging of all are the trees. The citrus and olive trees planted in garden boxes and around the property are living and growing without incident.

The rear of the property still needs more attention, as does the incomplete garden shed. Overall, though, the property saw significant progress during the year 2012. Staff are discussing the possibility of a children's garden and/or a part-time gardener if the proper funding can be secured. The plants have proven they will respond to the extra attention if it is given to them. Despite half of the computers in our computer lab not functioning, we are still welcoming children, youth and women to use them any time. We have done some training for the youth, women and children on how to access the Internet in a safe and trustworthy way with mutual respect and integrity.

Wiam's founder and Director

Zoughbi Zoughbi

>Mediation Report



Community conflict transformation continues to be a key facet of the Center's mission in Bethlehem. By using traditional Arab conflict mediation practices, called Sulha, and blending them with principles borrowed from other disciplines and regions, Wi'am continues to offer an effective alternative to litigation for community members living under difficult circumstances. We have been able to tackle 367 cases this year with the success of 87%. The remaining 13% are still pending cases. Such cases include the following: 110 domestic violence, 72 inheritance cases, 60 neighbor conflicts, 45 employee and employers, 35 between students, 25 child delinquency and 20 landlord and tenant. It is not an easy process. It requires dedication, perseverance and commitment. We listen with our compassionate hearts, spending enough time to have our shuttle diplomacy and sharing everything with others. Whenever conflict starts people either become historical or hysterical. We as mediators need to calm them down and have a three and one third day truce. After both parties calm down, we start the process of listening to both sides, humanizing both parties and creating trust and confidence building measures. Of course people are thirsty to talk and hungry to support. We always empower the weak and bring the strong to their senses and not to their knees. We are starting to call our mediation process conflict transformation more instead of conflict resolution because we are interested in creating and sustaining healthy relationships.

The Wi'am Center's current location is emblematic of its commitment to being a voice of nonviolent struggle in the midst of tension. The conflict in Gaza this November ignited latent frustrations in the local youth, triggering clashes at the 'flash-point' near our office. Youth gathered to throw stones at the guard toward adjacent to the gate, which separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem. They lit trash-fires and chipped concrete from its base. A barrage of tear-gas canisters followed each instance, so that the staff were forced to evacuate the office many days. When the smoke cleared, literally, staff members collected evidence of over forty tear-gas canisters. Yet this office remains and will remain here, maintaining the garden and playground, until such time that the flash-point is gone and the wall is wiped away. As the stone-throwing demonstrations faded, a more positive demonstration took place just before the United Nations vote on Palestinian statehood. People of all ages gathered to assert their right to remain as Palestinians, in an unoccupied Palestinian state. Some spray-painted messages upon the wall and

nearby cement barricades, expressing their disdain for the occupation and celebrating their national identity as Palestinians.

Wi'am maintains ties with nonviolent actions taking place in the Bethlehem area. A mass service held at Cremisan, a precious green space threatened by land confiscation in Beit Jala, on a weekly basis was a key demonstration during the 2012 calendar year. The community prepared for a hearing in the Israeli courts to determine the route of the illegal wall through Cremisan. The area belongs to the Latin Church and contains a parochial school and a monastery that produces fine wines. Members of the Christian community gathered for Holy Communion in the olive grove to show their presence and push the issue forward for the consideration of the Israeli and international communities.



Wi'am also stays current with the situations in Al-Waleje and Al-Masra, attending demonstrations when possible.

>Wiam's Speaking Engagement and International Visitors:

Wiam's Director and Staff have been engaged in different tours in different European countries , Middle Eastern countries as well as in Canada and USA. They spoke or attended conferences , and Seminars or gave lectures and talks or carried on workshops in different topics.

Wiam's staff have been hospitable with groups who come from the four corners of the world.

Most visitors came in groups by appointment but, as always, the gate remains opened during working hours so that travelers walking Bethlehem's streets can discover the Wi'am Center for themselves. By extending a hand of hospitality in Bethlehem, Wi'am hopes to extend the reach of its efforts for civic education and peace-building.

Staff arranged visits to key sites, from the nearby Aida refugee camp to the contested old city of Hebron and its divided Al-Ibrihami mosque. Citizen diplomacy activities are becoming increasingly important as the Palestinian context becomes more fragmented. Many tours in the Holy Land create 'shell-game tours' that merely meet peoples' preconceptions rather than giving a comprehensive cross-section of the area, people, and relevant issues. During 2012, Wi'am hosted 2159 people as part of the Citizen Diplomacy and Advocacy Project. Ninety-eight groups visited and learned more about the work of the center, its place in the community, and what the greater conflict in the region means for Palestinians in the West Bank. The goals of this project are to increase the number of visitors to Palestine and encourage them to bring the Palestinian narrative back to their home communities. We do this by providing opportunities for international citizens to feel at home in Bethlehem and learn about Palestine in the context of their own experience in the world community. Visitors journeyed to Wi'am from all across the world this past year. We hosted guests from across India, Latin America, Canada, the United States, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, Britain, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, and Japan. The participants in such groups were members of partner organizations, high school students, university students, political and religious leaders, teachers, business people and interfaith members. We arrange for them home stays, Palestinian food either for lunches or dinners. We introduce folks to the job creation project, home stay, refugee camps, participate in non-violence actions and take part in advocacy programs.



>Violence in Schools Project/ Peer mediation

Through the project we managed to reach 4 schools that had a rising trend of school violence (Frere School, Terra Sancta School, Latin Patriarchate School, Orthodox school, Talitha Kumi and the American School) in Bethlehem area. These schools found that the 10th grade ages 14-16 constitutes a critical age group and great challenge to the school that need urgent intervention to help reduce violence among students. The violence stemmed from the political situation of the occupation, domestic violence at home causing frustration and displaced anger projected onto peers, and bullying in general between peers.

We managed to work with a focus group including each of the four schools: teachers, students, parents and social workers. Through separate meetings with each focus, we reached a common Recommendation Letter (RL) that depicts their understanding of the causes of school violence and ways of reducing it. This RL was submitted during a ***Town Hall Meeting*** that hosted diverse stakeholders to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and schools in the area. In the meeting, the participants openly discussed the different points in the RL and put forth their own opinion regarding the best practices for intervention to reduce school violence. As a follow up to the RL, Wi'am organized regular meetings with the MOE in which teachers, parents and Wi'am staff met with members of the MOE. In the follow-up meetings, we discussed the progress that the MOE is making to disseminate and implement the RL. We urged the MOE to implement the RL at the National level to reach the wider schools all over the West Bank.



This devised Recommendations letter (RL) resulted in an increased satisfaction with the school climate reported by students and teachers, increased feelings of safety on school property, increased levels of self-esteem among students and student reports of a growing confidence in constructive and nonviolent conflict resolution.

>Children's Summer Camp



This camp The Wi'am Summer Camp (commencing from the July 9th to the 26th) facilitated 100 children (male and female), aged 6-15 years old, coming from different areas and backgrounds around Bethlehem. The camp divided children according to their age-groups providing them with suitable activities, learning and education according to their ability. Children are the most vulnerable stratum of a society. Summer camps contribute to shaping the personalities of children that participate in them. Summer camps focus on activities that help develop the physical, mental, psychological, and social aspects of a child's life. It provides opportunities for creativity, freedom of expression, critical thinking, and innovation.

Children spend their whole day at the camp which takes place on the Wi'am Center grounds and outside the center as the children participate in field trips. To make the space more suitable for summer activities, two large tarps were erected, providing shade for the upper and lower patio areas. Tables and chairs were used in the upper patio area in order to complete art projects. Inside, the conference room was available for smaller-scale activities such as skit rehearsals, more advanced art projects, and peer mediation workshops. The staff were assisted by community volunteers, and the older youth often helped lead activities for the smaller children. As part of making camp better for themselves and others, and learning about collective responsibility, youth helped in different tasks needed. The youth taught a traditional Palestinian dance called Dapka, theatre, games, arts and crafts, swimming, and counseling and guiding.



>Youth Programs

Wi'am works with youth from all faiths and walks of life. We work with youth on the ecumenical, national, regional and international levels. On the ecumenical level we work with youth from different churches and they attended conferences locally and internationally. They attended conferences with the world council of churches and national council of churches and have been able to visit the four corners of the world. These youth become ambassadors presenting the cause giving talks and workshops, or they themselves are encouraged to lead discussions and workshops all over Europe and the Middle East. Locally, we have different trainings for youth and interdisciplinary conflict resolution, conflict transformation, compassionate listening, human security, human rights, political awareness, advocacy tools and non-violence training.



>Women's Program

Weekly meetings continue on Thursdays, at Wi'am, and provide time for socialization but also an environment for education and growth. In an effort to bridge across communities, women from Wi'am visited Qalqilia as part of the 'get to know your country' project but also visited women's organizations throughout the West Bank region, including a West Bank shelter for women. Past workshops have touched on the topics of rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment in Palestine, giving those with strong emotions the chance to be heard individually. Other discussion topics include international law as a tool for enhancing women's rights, comparisons between the Irish and Palestinian conflicts and the complexities of joint peace efforts with Israeli women's groups. Other workshops focus on more practical matters, including: first-aid training, nutrition, diabetes and healthcare. Wi'am is excited to continue enriching women's lives with programs on human rights, civic engagement and democracy both for their own benefit and for the sake of the children and young people they influence. The woman also gathered to share together during the Christmas season in Bethlehem.



>Inheritance Project

With the support of Middle East Partner Initiative (MEPI), Wi'am have implemented a project called "Inheritance Denied: Combating gender inequality in property rights" in different parts of the West Bank such as Hebron, Bethlehem, Jordan Valley, and Nablus. The aim of the project is to help change women's position in society regarding their legal rights to inheritance, equality through advocacy, media campaigns, building women capacities and organizing community study circles to secure their legal rights to property and equality to ownership.



The participants of Wi'am's women's empowerment program which helped women attain their inheritance rights expressed how satisfied they were to discuss topics related to inheritance and women rights because of the urgent need to raise women's awareness of this. This topic has particular social repercussions that influence women's decisions and how they manage their responsibilities. At the end of the training, the participants expressed their wish that such trainings be extended to other areas in Palestine.

A base line study has been undertaken to explore the extent of which the current environment in the West Bank which encourages interest and efforts to promote and strengthen inheritance rights in Palestine is contributing to the enhancement of women's rights. The research team has faced a high level of unresponsiveness among the Religious "Shari'a" court and a shortage of data about cases of inheritance. The cultural values and the women's fear of losing their families' support is another reason that we believe has caused many woman to not give their stories about their struggle. Consequently, the research team had to refer to some literature that dealt with the issue with no credible statistics that could give a thorough indication of the problem.

>Volunteers

We appreciate all the support and voluntary work that the interns have done for us. Their presence has been a blessing to all of us. They have done marvelous work whether editing, helping in proposal writing, training and assisting in different activities and tasks. We participate in mutual learning, and they promise to be ambassadors of justice and peace in their respective countries. We wish all of them success in different walks of life. We will keep them in our prayers and thoughts. We encourage people from all over the world to come and volunteer because they will be a benefit to us and they will receive a unique experience and opportunity to learn and grow. They will enrich our dialogue of cultures and enhance dialogue of religion and with them we will enforce the global village that we belong to.

>Partners

We would like to thank all the support from our partners whether through volunteer or spirituality or prayers or exchange visiting as well as monetary donations. We also would like to acknowledge their invitation for us to visit their centers and countries for us to talk and share about our lives and Wi'am's work. We would like to present to them all a bouquet of flowers and heartfelt thanks to tell them without you this work would be impossible. God bless all of them and their different walks of life.